



Kentucky Artisan Center at Berea

Tourism, Arts and Heritage Cabinet

Donna and Donnie Smith Demonstrate Gourd Artistry at Kentucky Artisan Center at Berea

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BEREA, Ky. — Donna and Donnie Smith, of Waco, will demonstrate their carved and painted gourds from 10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Saturday, March 1, at the Kentucky Artisan Center at Berea.

The Smiths' journey as craftspeople began 23 years ago, when they planted gourds by their back porch. Donna eventually left her full-time job, and she and her husband, Donnie, became full-time gourd artists. Their work is a partnership, with Donna decorating the gourds with floral images or leaves that enhance the gourds' natural shapes. Some of their pieces become vases, when they take long-neck gourds and embellish them with vertical images.

Donna, who has a background in graphic design, draws on the gourd first with pencil, and then with a wood burning tool. The gourds are next painted with watercolors, inks, dyes and water-based stains, and sealed with a clear acrylic.

Most of the Smiths' gourds are raised on their 5-acre farm. A good dried gourd, though, is just the beginning. Each gourd must be washed to remove the outer skin which has molded and left an interesting pattern and texture on the gourd surface. Once the gourd is clean, it is sanded before its lid is cut. Donnie is constantly finding creative ways to cut gourds, transforming them into baskets and lidded vessels using cut-out filigreed designs that enhance and integrate the painted surface and form. Their newest designs have wooden inset bases that allow greater stability for the more vertical and asymmetrical gourds.

Works by the Smiths are regularly available at the Kentucky Artisan Center at Berea, located at 200 Artisan Way, just off Interstate 75 at Berea, Exit 77. The center's exhibits, shopping and travel information areas are open daily, year-round, from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., and the cafe is open from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Admission is free.

The Kentucky Artisan Center at Berea currently features works by more than 700 artisans from more than 100 counties across the Commonwealth. A special exhibit, "Repurposed and Recycled: Works by Kentucky Artisans," is on display through Sept. 6, and in the lobby the exhibit, "Kentucky Bourbon: Distillation and Inspiration" is on display. For more information about events call 859-985-5448, go to the center's website at www.kentuckyartisancenter.ky.gov or on Facebook at www.facebook.com/kentuckyartisan.center.

The Kentucky Artisan Center at Berea is an agency in the Tourism, Arts and Heritage Cabinet of the Commonwealth of Kentucky.



Donna Smith creates patterns on a gourd